

Durham Research Online

Deposited in DRO:

22 March 2017

Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Tan, E. and Joyce-Gibbons, A. and Loughlin, E. (2017) 'Developing student-led research : customer, consumer, colleague, collaborator.', EARLI 2017 University of Tampere, 29 August - 2 September 2017.

Further information on publisher's website:

<https://earli.org/earli-2017>

Publisher's copyright statement:

Additional information:

August 29th-September 2nd 2017

Use policy

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a [link](#) is made to the metadata record in DRO
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full DRO policy](#) for further details.

Developing student-led research: Customer, consumer, colleague, collaborator
Tan, E., Joyce-Gibbons, A., & Loughlin, E.

Abstract:

Three case studies, three years and three differing student-led methodologies. The common factor across all three case studies is that they are informed by student engagement and have a student-led focus. Research carried out by a team comprising of academics, support services and students explored the use of learning technologies in higher education with the aim of improving the learning experience for all. We share and explore our use of; students as co-researchers, open space technology, and students as partner methodologies to evaluate and understand the complex questions surrounding technology enhanced learning at one institution to create clear, understandable and actionable information that is negotiated between staff and students. In this paper we contrast the practicalities and lessons learned of each approach and share our developing understanding of student engagement for evaluation and educational development.

Extended Summary:

This paper documents the use of an emerging methodology as students as research partners over the period of three years and over the course of three separate case studies; Evaluation of the e-learning experience, personal online learning practices, and the use of technology to support transition. With each case study a methodology, each slightly different, focusing on student engagement was undertaken and the outcome of each approach evaluated and adapted in a process of iterative design and selection. We document an evolving project and an evolving understanding of students as partners.

The work that is covered in this paper was carried out by a team of researchers; trialling a number of approaches, methods and tools to undertaken inquiries exploring the use of education technology in higher education. The following approaches were used over the course of three years: Students as co-researchers (Fielding, 2001), Open Space Technology (Owens, 2008) and Students as Partners (Cook-Sather et al, 2014). In this paper we discuss the outcome of employing each methodology, and share stories "from the trenches" as it were of the realities of use. We compare and contrast the various student-led approaches and examine; the merits, weaknesses and considerations as well as the lived and mundane practicalities that can only learned by experience and the benefit of hindsight.

The research team was made of individuals from across one Higher Education institution, comprising of representatives from central IT services, Education, and Student Development centres. This partnership of academics, support staff and students sought to develop both research and understanding but importantly, with the involvement of central services, to also gain practical actionable information to improve the learning experience for students and staff.

There were a number of outcomes that all three projects aimed to achieve. The initial motivation for undertaking research in this way was to create open democratic channels of communication with students, and a desire to acknowledge the role of students as experts in the area for exploration. A separate but no less important, key outcome of this project was to provide students with a real world example to develop their research skills, knowledge and capabilities. Finally the research involving participants from across the institution was designed to honestly evaluate the tools and approaches used, in an attempt to improve the education experience for all students and understanding of personal learning practices with technology by staff. Providing information on the real adoption of centrally provided technology tools to understand their value and efficacy.

The data that was gathered from each of these projects uncovered a range of issues and considerations surrounding the role that technology plays in shaping and influencing the student learning experience. The nature of technology use varied between individuals departments and complex pictures of experience, understanding and adoption emerged, both culturally and among the students' own personally negotiated practice. In this paper we explore where contradictions emerge between approaches, how these are addressed and to what extent the various methodologies accommodated the variety of voices to be heard. We pose the questions of 'Who is talking?' and 'Who is creating the questions to be asked?' (Fielding, 2001).

Higher education and the student satisfaction within the UK Higher Education sector are coming under ever closer scrutiny (Middlehurst, 2016) with all aspects of the learning experience being closely examined. The issue discussed by this paper is that surveys are rarely representative of the students within an institution (Porter, 2012) and return a low response rate (Bell and Brooks, 2015). The questions raised are; how representative are the voices gathered in these forms of data collection, and to what extent can student-led and focused methods of engagement provide opportunities for more meaningful feedback and evaluation? Feedback and evaluation that is actionable, understood and importantly negotiated with students.

As a project team the key finding that emerged was of our understanding of how the student voice could be clearly heard and represented grew with our experience and experiments in student engagement. The ethos of student engagement and involvement underpins all three case studies. As the projects progressed we learned much about facilitating staff and student engagement, methods of promoting discussion, and developing mutual understanding.